

No* 7459.134

Nos. 85-113

4th

Ser.





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Boston Public Library

BAPTISM
AND
THE LORD'S SUPPER
AS INTERPRETED AND OBSERVED BY
UNITARIANS.

BY
REV. AUGUSTUS P. RECCORD.



AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,
BOSTON.

C

The object of the American Unitarian Association shall be to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure Christianity ; and all Unitarian Christians shall be invited to unite and co-operate with it for that purpose. — ARTICLE I. *of the By-Laws of the American Unitarian Association.*

UNIVERSITY PRESS :
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER AS INTERPRETED AND OBSERVED BY UNITARIANS.

For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body. — 1 COR. xii. 13.
This do in remembrance of me. — LUKE xxii. 19.

ONE of the first questions which confronted the early Church was as to how candidates were to be admitted to the Christian circle. If the faith and conscience of new disciples were to be publicly committed to the religion of Jesus, there must be some outward act or acts which they must perform.

In considering this question, Dr. Martineau states that "the ministry of Jesus himself suggested what these acts should be; for it had opened with the baptism and closed with the last supper; the one followed by the descent of the Spirit, the other by the sacrifice of himself. Let these be the model for every disciple's self-dedication, the beginning and completion of his union with Christ. Does he yearn for the Holy Spirit? Let him be baptized. Does he long to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and share in the immortality of Christ? Let him frequent the Lord's Supper, and there he will appropriate the benefits of the cross, and be fed on the manna of eternal life."

It is significant, as showing the pendulum-like swing of human thought and observance, that the Protestant world has preserved as its only sacraments these two of baptism and communion. It is doubly significant that

it is gradually returning to the original meaning and purpose of these observances as suggested by our texts; one as a symbol of that baptism of the Spirit which betokens membership in the Christian community, the other as a service of remembrance and consecration.

There are three distinct attitudes toward the so-called "sacraments" which must be recognized as having much to do with their interpretation and observance. The Catholic Church regards them as means of grace. Hence it has exaggerated the element of mystery and magic, while at the same time it has multiplied their number. To the two which can claim a New Testament origin, it has added five others, which have little or no Scriptural basis, — confirmation, penance or absolution, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony. Protestants have rejected these later additions and regard the two remaining — baptism and communion — as having no sacramental efficacy. They are merely occasions for the special manifestation of divine grace. Unitarians regard them as observances hallowed by tradition, made sacred by centuries of Christian usage, and deserving to be perpetuated because of their beautiful symbolism. To us they are respectively services of dedication and re-consecration. As such they are worthy of closer study and a truer understanding of their origin, history, and significance.

It is difficult to ascertain whether baptism was a Jewish custom before the time of Jesus or not. The Old Testament contains no reference to it, and in the New Testament we meet it for the first time in the ministry of John the Baptist. But if it was not one of the forms of Jewish purification, it was in entire harmony with its spirit. Among the Jews, as among many oriental people, the exigencies of a warm climate made cleanliness of paramount importance as a precaution against

disease and ill health. Hence the frequent washings and bathings and ablutions. Cleanliness was not merely "next to godliness," as with Wesley; it was a component part of godliness, and had an important place in their religious observances. What could be more natural than that John should have seized upon this purity of body, with which the people were all familiar, as a fitting symbol of that purity of life which he made a prerequisite to the coming of God's kingdom? He baptized with water, but it was only a symbol of that baptism of the Spirit which was to result in newness of life. "Wash you, make you clean," has been the cry of the moral reformer from that day to this. As Dean Stanley truly states, "John proclaimed the one indispensable condition of all spiritual religion, that the regeneration of the human spirit was to be accomplished, not by ceremonies or opinions, not by succession or descent, but by moral uprightness."

Not till the day of Pentecost was baptism regarded as a distinctively Christian rite. Although Jesus was baptized by John, he makes little mention of it, and never requires it of his disciples. He sends forth the Twelve without including it in the instructions given to them. The one passage which commands the eleven disciples to go forth and baptize all nations "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" betrays its later origin by using the language of the next century. Certainly those who maintain that this is a genuine command of the Master and that no baptism is valid without this Trinitarian formula, must be prepared to accept the logical conclusion of their premise, — namely, that few if any of the Apostolic baptismal services were valid. If there is any one thing of which we are sure, it is that it was the custom upon such occasions to baptize the new disciple "into the name of the Lord Jesus."

In like manner if Jesus had enjoined it we can hardly imagine St. Paul treating it with such supreme indifference as he displays. He thanks God that he baptized only a few, whose names even he cannot remember accurately, and then adds, "for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel."

Obviously, then, the observance of baptism as a Christian rite, a means of admission into the Christian fellowship, had its origin in Peter's action upon the day of Pentecost, calling upon the people to repent and be baptized "unto the remission of sins." Its development from this simple beginning into the complicated dogma of a later day is a matter of history. The "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," dating from the second century, forbade any to partake of the Lord's Supper "but those baptized into the name of the Lord." The third century assigned it to special seasons, — Easter or Pentecost. One by one the various ceremonial appendages were added: the eastward posture, anointing with oil, consecration of the water, laying aside of old garments, laying on of hands, clothing the candidate with white vestments, burning tapers, the kiss of peace, milk, honey, and salt, and finally the administration of the first communion.

With this change of form there came a change of significance. With the Baptist it symbolized repentance and purification from sin. With St. Paul it was a "death of the believer with Christ unto the flesh, and a resurrection with him unto the new life in the spirit." In the early Church it combined both of these elements and added a third: it stood for physical, moral, and spiritual cleanliness; it symbolized the death of the old self and the rebirth of the new; and it demanded as a prerequisite a profession of faith in Christ and a determination to walk in his steps.

The next century made it indispensable to salvation. It was the supreme condition of entrance into the Church and participation in the communion. Later, all sorts of magical notions began to collect about it. Instead of a symbol, it became a means of grace. Some thought the water was transformed into the blood of Christ; others that it possessed the miraculous power to wipe all sins away. "The boy Athanasius, throwing water in jest over his playmate on the sea-shore, performed, as it was believed, a valid baptism; the apostles in the spray of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, the penitent thief in the water that rushed from the wound of the Crucified, were imagined to have received the baptism which had else been withheld from them." Obviously, the later in life one was baptized, the more the sins that would be washed away. Hence it became the custom to defer baptism, — often, as in the case of the Emperor Constantine, until just before death, in order that the sins of a whole life might be removed.

Disputes naturally arose as to the precise effect of the baptismal service. Calvin denied its supernatural efficacy, and maintained that it was merely the sign of a salvation which was already complete. Only the election of God could save. The baptism of the non-elect was void. The anti-Calvinists asserted that regeneration was effected through baptism, and hence every baptized person was regenerate.

Another controversy arose concerning infant baptism. We have no way of determining the usage of the apostolic Church, but by the end of the second century it was a common practice. Baptism was absolutely necessary to salvation, and hence unbaptized infants were shut out from the Kingdom of God. This harsh doctrine suffered the fate of all doctrines which are opposed to the most fundamental humanitarian instincts. First, it was so

modified as to admit unbaptized infants to a sort of half-way heaven, where they would be free from torment, but deprived of the highest blessings. Later, even this restriction was abandoned, and the gates of heaven were thrown open wide to these little ones, whose "angels do always behold the face of the Father."

To-day the baptismal service is being gradually restored to the simplicity and purity of its original meaning and significance. One by one the accretions of ages have been stripped off. As less stress is laid upon the water, it matters little whether one is sprinkled or immersed. As it loses its magical efficacy, the tendency is to push it forward toward the beginning of life rather than postpone it until the end. Thus, whereas formerly adult baptism was the rule and infant baptism the exception, to-day infant baptism is the rule and adult baptism, save among the Baptists, is rare.

Adult baptism is granted by some churches upon the relation of personal experience and confession of faith; by others upon assent to catechism or creed. Unitarians grant it to all who accept the religion of Jesus and desire to follow in his steps. They believe with Robertson that "all men are children of God by right, but not in fact until they recognize their sonship, believe in it and live it." Of this recognition, baptism is simply the visible declaration, saying, "Now remember you are a child of God; from henceforth live as such."

The baptism of children, or "christening," as it is so often called, has a double significance. First of all, it is a dedication of their little souls to God. Just as Mary went up at the appointed time and presented the infant Jesus in the temple; just as, in later years, mothers brought their little ones to him that he might bless them; so to-day we bring our little ones into the temple of God and consecrate them to his service. As

we pray for God's holy spirit to descend upon them, even as it is said to have descended so many years ago, we venture the hope that this childlike purity, of which the water is but the emblem, may never be tarnished, and that the childlike unfolding may be symmetrical and complete.

“I think, when I read that sweet story of old,
 When Jesus was here among men,
 How he called little children as lambs to his fold,
 I should like to have been with him then.
 I wish that his hands had been placed on my head,
 That his arms had been thrown around me,
 And that I might have seen his kind look when he said,
 ‘Let the little ones come unto me.’”

But this is longing for the impossible. And yet, although the children may not feel his hand upon their brows, nor feel his arms around them, nor hear his voice, yet with our help they may be so reared that the Christ-spirit will dwell within them, that his voice will be heard whispering to them, and that together with him they will feel that they are ever supported and sustained by the Everlasting Arms.

This suggests the second significance. It is not only a dedication of these little ones, but of their parents and elders as well. As we feel how great is childhood's innocence and purity, how perfect its love and trust, we may be pardoned if for the moment we are led to regard them as messengers of God sent forth to rebuke the world for its selfishness and hypocrisy, and to announce that the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither can men take it by force, but it yields only to the simplicity and purity and faith of the little child. We appreciate at length those beautiful words of Faber, —

“Thy home is with the humble, Lord!
 The simplest are the best.
 Thy lodging is in childlike hearts,
 Thou makest there Thy rest.”

And so with this vision of childlike purity and holiness before our eyes, we dedicate ourselves to the bringing in of that Heavenly Kingdom which will be ushered in only as we too become as little children.

Our consideration of the baptismal service has prepared us in a way for a consideration of the Lord's Supper. It is with a feeling of surprise that we read the simple words with which Jesus enjoined its observance upon his disciples, — "This do in remembrance of me." It seems hardly possible that so simple a rite, and one so clear in its significance, could ever have been the starting-point of those metaphysical speculations which sorely puzzled the minds of the mediæval theologians. At first we cannot understand how any sane mind could give to this simple service of commemoration the mystical significance of the later Eucharistic observance. Certainly the accounts of the "Last Supper" in the "large upper room" contain no hint of its sacramental nature, no suggestion that it was to become an ecclesiastical institution, and no provision for its extension beyond the limits of those who were present. Its central thought was "remembrance of Jesus." It was the natural wish of Jesus, as he observed the passover with his disciples for the last time, that they should not forget him, that they should remember him at their passover meal, and if possible feel the power of his spiritual presence. It was almost inevitable that after his death they should remember this last request, and that their simple meal should become the "Lord's Supper," and commemorate the last occasion upon which they had broken bread with their acknowledged Lord and Master. Thus it became a bond of union among believers, and constituted the crowning act of the religious life.

For the mediæval theologian, however, this was not

enough. Instead of the simple service, when the heathen members of the congregation were dismissed and the Christian believers remained and communed together, there was substituted a mystical ceremony from which, as we have seen, all who were not baptized were excluded. Instead of a bond of union, it became a test of exclusion. The glorified Christ was represented as dwelling bodily in the elements. The bread and wine became his actual flesh and blood. Later, this doctrine of "consubstantiation," as it was called, was still more refined, and we have the theory of "transubstantiation," the doctrine that Christ is not actually present in the elements, but that the bread and wine are changed into his flesh and blood and received by all who partake, irrespective of the character of the priest or of the belief of the recipient.

This marked the extreme swing of the pendulum. Since the Reformation, the course of development has been slowly retraced. Luther affirmed the real presence of Christ in the elements, who was received by all communicants, worthy and unworthy alike. Calvin maintained only a spiritual presence of Christ, who was received only by true believers. Orthodox Protestants leaned toward this position, regarding the communion as merely an occasion when Christ manifests himself with special power; while Unitarians returned to the purely commemorative use of the early Church.

Naturally the pendulum then began to swing toward the opposite extreme. Men and women of the purest motives and most exemplary character began to entertain conscientious scruples against its observance. They could not, at first, free it from its former associations, its implication of the supernatural, or its apparent expression of an actual state of perfection rather than of the hope of future righteousness. Ralph Waldo Emerson

resigned his pulpit rather than continue the administration of a sacrament in which he had neither belief nor interest, while others administered it with many misgivings. Such an extreme position, however, could not be final. As the old-time associations faded away, and the memory of mediæval abuses became more faint, it was seen that in this simple service there was a most precious means of spiritual power and strength.

The life of the late O. B. Frothingham furnishes a most valuable illustration of the change which has taken place in liberal thought. During the later years of his ministry he abandoned its observance, not because of lack of personal interest, as with Emerson, but because he regarded it as dividing those who ought to be united, as encouraging a form of self-righteousness, and as implying a grace that did not exist. Hence he termed it a "mere formality, without an excuse for being."

After such words, expressing his belief of some forty years ago, it is instructive to find him, a few years before his death, expressing his reverence for the observance in the highest terms. "It is no longer a ceremony or a tradition," he writes, "but a means of spiritual cultivation. It stands for fellowship and aspiration, not for a communion of saints, but of all those who desire to share the saintly mind, of all who aim at perfection. . . . The idea of spiritual communion is a grand one. It is universal; it is human in the best sense. True, the ceremony contains no thought or sentiment which is not expressed in the sermon or the prayer, but it puts these in poetic form; it addresses them directly to the imagination, it associates them with the holier souls in their holiest hours, and brings people face to face with their better selves in the tenderest and most touching manner, teaching charity, love, endeavor after the religious life. . . . A symbol often goes further than an argument, and a

symbol so ancient and so consecrated ought to be preserved."

From this change in the attitude of the great radical, we can gather the straws which reveal to us the tendency of the liberal thought of to-day. According to Renan, "the work of the twentieth century will consist in taking out of the waste-basket a multitude of excellent ideas which the nineteenth century has needlessly cast into it." This work has already begun. One by one the discarded ceremonies and usages of the Christian Church are being gathered up, divorced from their mystical associations, given new, or rather older, interpretations, and restored to a place of honor among our ecclesiastical institutions. When we meet together for the purpose of commemorating the last supper of Jesus and the disciples, we do not seek to draw an imaginary line between sinner and saint, nor do we expect any miraculous transformation either of the elements of the supper or of our own lives. We meet together because we wish to heed the injunction of the Master, — "This do in remembrance of me."

First, we remember the Master himself. We turn back in our thought to the scene of that last supper in the upper room, and try to hear again the words of wisdom which he uttered. We can hardly over-estimate the value of such commemoration. The whole world recognizes the need of keeping the memory of other leaders ever fresh and vivid. We have our Washington's day, our Patriots' day, our Memorial day, our Independence day, — all for the purpose of keeping certain men or certain events in everlasting remembrance. If the smouldering fires of patriotism are re-kindled by such red-letter days, is it wrong to assume that the smouldering fires of religious faith may be quickened and fanned into an enduring flame by this periodic commemoration of our Lord's Supper?

Again, it is not only a communion with the Master and with each other, but with all those saintly souls who have tried to follow in his footsteps. It not only goes back by direct historic association to the Founder of Christianity, but it recalls those noble men and women of each successive generation who have proved loyal to the Christ ideal. It is no longer a mere remembrance, but a symbol of human brotherhood, of the communion of God's children of every age and every race. We feel with the poet Whittier, —

“That all of good the past hath had
Remains to make our own time glad, —
Our common, daily life divine,
And every land a Palestine.”

And then, again, we realize that it is not only the remembrance of an historic personage, but of an *ideal*; that it is not only a remembrance of the past, but an expression of hope for the future. Now and then we hear the cry “Back to Jesus,” but we realize that his ideal of life and character is still far in advance of the best of us. The rebirth of Christianity will not come through any merely intellectual search for the purpose of learning more about the facts of his life; it will come through the labor and travail of human souls yearning to share the purity of his spirit, the simplicity of his faith, the sanity of his life.

We may not be able to give adequate expression to our feelings of discipleship toward him, but we may at least take part in this commemorative service and thus manifest our admiration for the Christ spirit, and our loyalty to the Christ ideal. And so with this interpretation of the significance of the Lord's Supper; the invitation to it is as broad and inclusive as the spirit of Christianity itself.

“Lo! the feast is spread to-day.
Jesus summons: come away
From the vanity of life,
From the sounds of mirth or strife,
To the feast by Jesus given, —
Come, and taste the Bread of Heaven.”

Such are the “sacraments” of the liberal faith. They are a part of our religious inheritance. They suggest the beginning and the end of that brief ministry which gave us a new civilization and a new era. Gratefully received, truthfully interpreted, and reverently administered, they will be to us what they have been to others, a source of spiritual power and inspiration.

ALL BOOKS

BY

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE,

Whether published by the AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION, or not, are kept on sale at its Book-Room, and will be sent, postage-paid, on receipt of price.

THE COMPLETE LIST IS AS FOLLOWS:—

Christian Doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sin	\$0.50
Christian Doctrine of Prayer	0.75
Common Sense in Religion: a Series of Essays	2.00
Essentials and Non-Essentials in Religion. Paper, 25 cents; Cloth	0.50
Events and Epochs in Religious History: being the Substance of a Course of Twelve Lectures delivered at the Lowell Institute, Boston, in 1880	2.00
Every-Day Religion	1.50
Go up Higher; or, Religion in Common Life	1.50
Life and Times of Jesus as related by Thomas Didymus	1.50
Life of Jesus. By Dr. Carl Hase. (Translation)	0.75
Memorial and Biographical Sketches	2.00
Orthodoxy: Its Truths and Errors	1.25
Selections from Sermons Preached in the Church of the Disciples Paper	0.50
Self Culture: Physical, Intellectual, Moral, and Spiritual	1.50
Steps of Belief; or, Rational Christianity maintained against Atheism, Free Religion, and Romanism	1.00
Ten Great Religions. An Essay in Comparative Theology	2.00
Ten Great Religions. Part II. A Comparison of all Religions	2.00
The Hour which Cometh	1.50
The Ideas of the Apostle Paul Translated into their Modern Equivalents	1.50
The Problem of the Fourth Gospel. The Question of its Origin Stated and Discussed. Paper, 25 cents; cloth	0.50
Veiled Questions in Theology: a Series of Essays	1.00

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

25 BEACON STREET, BOSTON, MASS.

SEP 28 1961
BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 06435 133 9

